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ABSTRACT

Team projects are commonly used for assignments in advertising coursework, since they parallel the team effort which ad professionals experience as a customary part of their work experience. However, while offering many benefits, this teaching format often means reduced visibility and/or responsibility for the individual. In creating this agency pseudo-reality, an essential element of reality is usually omitted, that is that the egos of account team members in a real advertising agency often vie, and the work load is not always shared equitably. Also, in the reality of the academic world, team assignments, although they add variety, realism, and opportunities for more focused instruction, conflict with the responsibility of instructors to evaluate the student in terms of his or her own unique contribution. Self-promotion requires each student to assume responsibility for making the instructor aware of his or her individual efforts on team projects--just as success in the real agency world requires the team member to self-promote to a significant other. Students are given an outline of the concept, an assigned reading list and proposal for self-application. Each student has an individual consultation with the instructor, followed by team, instructor and personal evaluation at the end of the term. Self-promotion contributes to an overall educational goal of pushing students to develop their potential. (Three exhibits outlining self-promotive techniques and references are attached.) (RAE)

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ABSTRACT

Resolving Reality and Academe: Putting the Individual Back Into the Team Project

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Team projects are commonly used for assignments in advertising coursework. While offering many benefits, this teaching format often means reduced visibility and/or responsibility for the individual -- an important drawback both from the standpoint of realistic simulation of agency team work and from the standpoint of satisfactory academic structure. The paper discusses an approach being used by the authors to minimize this problem without sacrifice of the intrinsic benefits of the collaborative exercise.

Submitted for consideration: 1988 meeting, AEJMC, Advertising Division, Teaching Standards program.

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Resolving Reality and Academe:
Putting the Individual Back Into the Team Project

Team projects. Group assignments. Account teams.

No matter what they're called, assignments which require that students tackle them through a group effort flourish in advertising courses nationwide. It's a staple in the advertising educator's arsenal of tactics whether the course be campaigns, media, research, or creative.

To be sure, concrete benefits accrue for both students and instructors from the team approach. Yet, despite the benefits it affords and its popularity, the team approach is -- in part -- at odds with its stated primary benefit.

Here's what we mean.

The primary benefit of team assignments is that they parallel the team effort which ad professionals experience as a customary part of their work environment. It's yet another tactic we employ to help students replicate reality. By creating this team orientation to work tasks, instructors

aid students in stretching a bridge between their future work environment and the academic environment with its traditional emphasis on individual effort and growth. Up until the time most students are accepted into an advertising program and enroll in our courses, they've handled the majority of their course assignments on a solo basis.

This primary advantage of the team approach, however, has an interrelated, two-pronged downside. Here, group effort collides with individual effort in terms of its reality and its utility on both the agency and the academic fronts.

First, in creating this agency pseudo-reality, we usually omit or ignore an essential element of the reality of the work-a-day world. That world has its reward system of raises, promotions, and perks which demands some sort of visibility for an individual team member's efforts. Too often, we minimize or even ignore that when we rhapsodize to students about the greater glory of teamwork.

And for all the touting "team spirit" receives, it doesn't alter the fact that egos of account team members in a real advertising agency often vie, and the work load is not always shared equitably. That too, we often overlook when describing the reality of agency teamwork to our students. Of course, as they undertake the assignment, they soon discover these problems for themselves. But since we haven't provided for

these aspects of reality in creating the task for them, students are left uncertain about the relationship between these experiences and those they'll find in the world of work.

Second, in the reality of the academic world, team assignments are both a boon and a bane. A boon, not only for the variety and realism they may add to the menu of assignments, but for the opportunities they offer at more focused instruction. A bane, however, because the reality of the academic world requires instructors to assign grades which reflect what each student's efforts has earned. Even on group efforts, the ideal is to evaluate the student in terms of his or her own unique contribution.

In summary, then, team assignments usually fall short of simulating work-a-day reality by ignoring the dynamics of indivdiual needs which are an active, if sub-surface, component of team problem solving. And, in an academic environment, they conflict with the practical need to assign grades to students differentiated on an individual basis. These two nettlesome drawbacks of team assignments long seemed inevitable trade-offs -- necessary minuses to be accepted if the genuine benefits which are available are to be enjoyed. But the two drawbacks are complementary. Each concerns the team member as an individual. Some resolution of the two should be possible.

In the past few semesters, we tried an approach that is

the best solution we've found to date. We've instituted an ageless strategy in our classes: self-promotion. Each student assumes responsibility for making us aware of his or her individual efforts on team projects -- just as success in the real agency world will require the team member to self-promote to a significant other. And it seems to work well. Too, we feel our teaching standards of realism, honesty, and fairness in the classroom are more fully realized.

Here's how we approach it.

First, we talk with students realistically about the relative importance and utility of group versus individual effort. This talk is formally scheduled in the syllabus of any course where a group assignment will account for a significant portion of the students' grades.

We begin the talk by asking students to look ahead and envision themselves working in an agency. It's on that environment we want them to focus, not the academic one, as we talk about the pros and cons of team efforts.

What do we talk about? As the outline for this mini-lecture indicates (See Exhibit A), we try to keep our focus tight and pragmatic.

To reinforce for students that balancing the need for team effort with that of individual effort is an on-going professional thorn, the perspectives of various advertising

professionals are shared with students. (See Exhibit B).

Despite our preference to sensitize students to the working world significance of the pros and cons of team efforts, we're aware that this generation of students has a preoccupation with grades. Given a moment's opportunity, they voice the grading concerns they hold about team assignments. Concerns such as:

.Will my grade be affected negatively by the failure of a member of the team to do his or her work or, doing poor work?

.Will an unproductive or uncooperative team member earn an undeservedly high grade as a result of other team members "carrying" that person?

In answer to these concerns, we identify some of the areas on which individual grades are more typically based for a team assignment. These include: review exams; placement exams (or skill demonstrations); evaluation of the portion of the assignment or campaign for which the student was uniquely responsible; and evaluation of the student's contribution by other team members. We note that exams, in this situation are neither palatable, nor realistic; and, we stress that the latter two of these four grading bases can be difficult to assess.

It's at this point that we try to merge our remarks about individuals and teams in agencies with those about the academic dilemma of individual grading for group projects.

Students are advised that <u>they</u> must assume the

responsibility for making their contribution to a team effort visible -- whether in a "real" agency or an academic team -- if they wish to get credit for that contribution. That means they must engange in positive self-promotion.

Students are given a brief list of books on self-promotion. They're also given a list of relevant journals and periodicals in which they might find articles on self-promotion or the management of self-promotion. (See Exhibit C.)

For the next class meeting, students are told to bring a set of proposals for how they will make visible and memorable their contributions to their team's efforts. The sources on which the proposals are based must be documented. Here are the criteria for the proposals:

- .A minimum of three self-promotion tactics must be proposed.
- .What's meant by each proposal and how the student will carry it out must be detailed.
- .Each tactic must be amenable to an emphasis on how the student's individual effort helped the team effort.
- .Each proposed tactic must be evaluated by the student for its appropriateness to the working agency environment. If all of the proposals are more appropriate to the academic environment, another which <u>is</u> appropriate to the agency environment must be specified.

Each student consults individually with the instructor about his or her proposals and "contracts" for a mutually agreeable program of self-promotion tactics. From then on, it's the student's responsibility to abide by the contract.

Each student's visibility efforts (or copies thereof) are maintained in a public inspection file and are available for perusal by other members of the student's team. This availability to other team members tends to dissuade students from claiming feats or contributions they didn't actually make. Too, the compiled record serves as a memory freshner at the end of the term when evaluations are made by members of the team and by the instructor. Thus, while the student is becoming practiced in self-promotional behaviors, a more solid foundation is being built for individual grading. That is, the self-promotion record establishes a concrete basis from which the instructor can determine a student's contribution to the group effort, and upon which fellow team members can base their evaluations of the student (either concurring or dissenting).

What do students propose as self-promotion tactics? Most of their proposals are rather traditional. Those which are innovative require modification to be appropriate for a visibility bid at an actual agency. Here's a sampling of tactics proposed by students:

.Preparation of follow-up memos to suppliers, clients, and so forth.

.A participation journal with entries noting feelings, new perspectives, etc., as well as personal contributions.

.A weekly memo noting accomplishments of the past week and anticipating the work needed during the next week.

.A weekly news release targeted at such trade puplication features as Advertising Age's "People Works" or "Ad Whirl."

.Thank you notes to other team members about shared, collaborative efforts.

.A scrapbook with detailed captions (an entire team's collective effort at recording and specifing individual efforts).

."Doing Lunch" with the instructor to update and lobby about the student's accomplishments -- [unfortunately, not an acceptable tactic].

.Audio cassette diary.

Of course, these sorts of tactics can not fully replicate the approaches to self-promotion which are practiced in an agency world -- and we can't expect them to. To that extent, we haven't completely solved the problem with which we began. But it seems to go further than other solutions we've tried. Does the emphasis we place on the relative merits of the group versus the individual approach make a difference?

We feel it does. We feel it's a true asset in helping us maximize our standards for the advertising classroom of reality, honesty, and fairness. It also contributes to an

overall educational goal of pushing students to develop their individual potential. Students, in writing their course evaluations, speak of less tangible but more personally significant benefits:

> "I realize now it's not so smart to assume that other people are aware of how much time and effort you put into a group assignment. Especially when they're not always all there to see it."

> "It's seemed before that members on a team felt they only had to do <u>their</u> part. This way, everyone seemed more positive about helping out even when we weren't working on their section."

> "I'm the sort of person who performs best if I can impress others. With all the talk I've heard about team work, I guess I'd gotten the idea that in agencies nobody was into that. So although I know I can't be a bore about it, I'm relieved to know that I'm not weird in wanting to have my work (when it's good) be praised and rewarded."

> "I'm not real comfortable tooting my own horn, but I guess it's like that guy said: If you don't toot your own horn, nobody else will."

EXHIBIT A

--OUTLINE--

I. Establishing an Agency Perspective.
Review: Typical Agency Organizational Structure
- A. Formal Structure: Purposes
  1. Staffing
  2. Salary Administration
- B. Working Structure: Forms/Purposes
  1. Informal group--account centered
  2. Stable group--creative service personnel constant members

II. Group Approach to Problem Solving
- A. Advantages of group approach
  1. Broader range of intellectual capabilities
  2. Mix of different perceptions
  3. "Electric" stimulus of group participation
- B. Disadvantages of group approach
  1. Difficulty in recognizing individual effort for reward system benefits
  2. Competitive ego/needs impede true teamwork
  3. Disproportional sharing of work load
  4. Productivity profits from individual approach for some personality types
  5. Noted professionals' comments

III. Group Approach in Academe
- A. Parallel to agency advantages and disadvantages
- B. Difficulties with grading individual effort on group projects

IV. Assignment: Responsibility for Self-Promotion
- A. Self-promotion explained
- B. Self-promotion in business vs. academic world
- C. Criteria for students' proposals/due date

EXHIBIT B

--Professionals' Perspectives--
On
The Individual and The Team

.David Ogilvy's remarks on perks:
"Agencies are breeding-grounds for sibling rivalry. Will Cadwallader get a corner office before Balfour? Why did you invite Pennypacker to lunch instead of Morgan. ...." (pp46-47)

.Whit Hobbs' plea for teamwork:
"Advertising isn't a business for loners or prima donnas. I wish that more people who are in the business or wondering if they should be in it would understand this fact. This is a very tough, complicated business, and again and again it has been proved that the more effectively people work together to create advertising, the more successful the advertising." (pp38-39)

.Edward Buxton's "informed assessment of creatives"
"A large number of creative people can never adjust to team work and cooperation. They are individualists, people who prefer to work entirely on their own. . . Yet so much commercial creative work involves shared work, shared responsibility." (p46)

"It would be nice to believe that creative people share a warm bond of camaraderie -- a brotherhood of talent, so to speak. In reality, there is very little of this in the hotly contested ranks of commercial creative work. Both inside and outside the offices creative people can be savagely aggressive, selfish, ambitious -- and in not a few cases, outright bastards." (p 127)

"Creative people can fight unfairly in meetings, too. A snicker, a sarcastic comment can often rip a competitor in the presence of important executives." (p 128)

EXHIBIT B
--CONTINUED--

John M. (Jack) Keil on managing collaboration:

"In any phase of collaboration, it can do nothing but help if the collaborators can collaborate. And the world is full of collaborative successes. . . . But their accomplishments . . . seem to be the result of creative specialists in different but related fields working together. . . . They don't compete." (p209)

Keil on individual rewards:

"In managing the creative mind, it would be nice if all we had to worry about was the pure creative development. But unfortunately, creative people are people, with all of the intertwining habits and slight psychoses everyone else has. And through it all flows the river of ambition, which means that for the work generated, the generator demands recognition and reward. Discovering what that recognition is for each creative person is another key to successfully managing the creative process.

"Ususally this recognition calls for more than money. For some it's also a title -- a higher rung on the ladder to corporate success. For others it can be publicity -- recognition from peers and the general public of a creative accomplishment. This publicity can be more than just ego stroking. It can mean new job opportunities." (p21)

Buxton, Edward. Creative People At Work. New York: Executive Communications, Inc., 1975.

Hobbs, Whit. I Love Advertising. New York: AdWeek Books, 1985.

Keil, John M. The Creative Mystique. How to Manage It, Nurture It and Make It Pay. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1985.

Ogilvy, David. Ogilvy On Advertising. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

EXHIBIT C

--Resources for Self-Promotion Tactics--

BOOKS

Dudley, George. The Psychology of Call Reluctance.

Gould, Richard. Sacked! Why Good People Get Fired and How to Avoid it.

Jandt, Fred E. Win-Win Negotiating: Turning Conflict Into Agreement.

Korda, Michael. Success! How Every Man and Woman Can Achieve It.

McCormack, Mark H. What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School: Notes From A Street-Smart Executive.

Ringer, Robert J. Looking Out For #1.

Journals

Academy of Management Journal

Business Horizons

Business Quarterly

Personnel Administrator

Periodicals

Inc.

Success

Venture